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The Unforeseen Defection

Romania's Disengagement from the Final Solution*

MIHAI CHIOVEANU

"The last day of the year...I carry inside myself the 364 terrible days of the dreadful year we are closing tonight. But we are alive. We can still wait for something. There is still time; we still have some time left"
Mihail SEBASTIAN, December 31, 1941

"The Jews in the General Government, beginning in Lublin are now being evacuated to the east. This is a pretty barbaric procedure, not to be described here more precisely, and of the Jews themselves not much will remain... No other government and no other regime would have the strength to solve this question comprehensively"
Joseph GOEBBELS, March 27, 1942

"Paradoxically, the country which ran Germany a close second in massacring Jews was also the country in which more Jews survived than anywhere else in occupied Europe. Subjected to discrimination, crippling financial exactions and compulsory labor, the Jews were nonetheless spared"¹. To my knowledge, no other scholar succeeded to encapsulate in a more comprehensive and accurate way this particular episode of the Romanian (and European) Holocaust that continues to fascinate the reader and trouble the historian's mind. Though many Holocaust students before and after Michael Burleigh accepted the challenge, embarking on the effort to solve this particular "unanswered question", most failed, barely dedicating one sentence, or a paragraph at best, to this yet another paradox in Romania's modern history². All in all, six decades after the events, but few historians succeeded to grasp the set of elements that altogether provide us with an adequate explanation for Romania's gradual shift from total commitment to outright defiance toward the Nazi Final Solution³.

Not surprisingly, before and sometimes even after 1989, Romanian historiography paid much more attention to this episode. Yet, the goal was different this

* The author expresses his gratitude to Professor Armin Heinen (University of Aachen) and Professor Daniel Barbu (University of Bucharest) for their suggestions and comments.

¹ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich, A New History*, Pan Books, London, 2001, pp. 658-659.

² See Martin GILBERT, *Holocaust. A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1985, p. 637; Robert S. WISTRICH, *Hitler and the Holocaust*, A Modern Library Chronicles Book, New York, 2003, p. 157; Laurence REES, *Auschwitz. A New History*, PublicAffairs, New York, 2005, p. 210.

³ See Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle, Chicago, 1961, pp. 682-702; Jean ANCEL, "Plans for Deportation of the Rumanian Jews and Their Discontinuation in Light of Documentary Evidence (July-October 1942)", in Michael R. MARRUS (ed.), *The Nazi Holocaust. Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews*, Meckler, Westport, London, 1989, pp. 334-373; Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, Editura Hassefer, București, 1998, pp. 325-339; Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, pp. 168-172.

time, rather ideological and political. Romanian historians spotted the light on the efforts of the Romanian government to resist and foil the German Final Solution in as much as to resiliently claim that, unlike in other European countries, in Romania, Jews were protected by Ion Antonescu and his regime and thus, saved. Together with the emigration policy that was still "encouraged" by the government, and the absence of gas chambers on Romania's territory, the fact that most Romanian Jews within the Old Kingdom (Regat), Southern Transylvania and Banat, around 300 thousands souls, did not reached the factories of death in Poland was blatantly turned into an irrefutable argument for the denial of Holocaust in Romania¹.

The aim of the present text is not to overcome the myth of a Second World War Romania as a "haven for Jews", at least from late 1942 onward, and when compared with other European countries such as Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, France and Holland. Also, it is not my intention to simply point out that Romanian Jews were not saved but rather spared, with the latest term describing truthfully the fate of a considerable part of the Romanian Jewry. Nonetheless, both issues will be touched upon.

My chief interest is with delineating the reasons and motivations behind the decision of the Romanian government not to hand over half of the Jews to the Nazis. Contrary to what others might think, I consider that understanding the decision-making process, and the strategic logic of the perpetrators, is no less essential than the final outcome, the fortuitous (in many respects) survival of the already targeted victims². The major risk of not doing so would be to continue with the somewhat simplistic, "intentionalist" approach that reduces everything to Ion Antonescu's personality, and as to credit the Romanian dictator alone with the "merit" to halt the deportation, thus "saving" the Romanian Jews – Antonescu himself stated during his 1946 trial that the Romanian Jews were still alive thanks to him³.

Aware of the importance of the micro-level perpetrators, the level where genocide actually takes place, I decided not to focus on the entire chain of command but solely on the macro-level perpetrators. Genocide students consider this level to be far more important as "blueprints are drawn here, serial mass killing outlined, and genocidal mentality shaped sometimes only to be latter filtered down"⁴. In other words, the top decision-makers are the ones that can gear or conversely stop the "machinery of destruction". Limited attention is given to the bystanders, and even less to the victims, except, briefly, the Jewish leaders and their efforts to rescue the remnants of their community at large. Though, it is not my intention to turn Mihail Sebastian into a paradigmatic case, I took the time to go, once more, through his diary, an excellent testimony of the desolate status of Romanian Jewry, whose situation deteriorated over time, "regaled" as they were with endless hate-filled speeches, shabby treatment by authorities and neighbors, and contributions reaching staggering amounts of money. Isolated, persecuted, listening on Radio Hitler's

¹ Bela VAGO, "The Destruction of Romanian Jewry in Romanian Historiography", in Yisrael GUTMAN, Gideon GREIF (eds.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1988, pp. 405-406, 411, 415. See also Gheorghe ZAHARIA, Nicolae COPOIU, "The Situation of the Jews of Romania, 1938-1944, as reflected in Romanian Historiography", in *Ibidem*, p. 427.

² See Dinu C. GIURESCU, *România în al doilea război mondial*, Editura All, București, 1999, p. 146.

³ Sorin ALEXANDRESCU, *Paradoxul român*, Editura Univers, București, 1998, pp. 155-156.

⁴ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", in Robert GELLATELY, Ben KIERNAN (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide. Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 254

annual speeches and dreadful threats on the total extermination of European Jewry, reading German newspapers announcing the imminent deportation of Jews, facing new legislation, waves of deportation and rumors about the "unthinkable" taking place in the East, giving up hope as they were living in permanent uncertainty and overwhelmed by panic, they could but end up being mentally much to exhausted to even wonder that they are still alive¹. Would it be enough to realize what was the life of a "saved" Romanian Jew at the time?

The decision of the Romanian government to create its own national agency in charge with Jewish affairs rather than accepting Nazi (SS) nominees to deal with, the clumsiness, opportunism and corruption of the Romanian bureaucracy, Ion Antonescu's studied independence, Radu Lecca's visit to Berlin from august 1942 that went badly wrong, the high-powered lobbying from the Apostolic Nuncio, the Swiss and the US ambassadors, and Queen Mother Helena, the interventions of some Jewish leaders, Romanian politicians and heads of the Romanian Orthodox Church, international pressures, the evolution of the war on the Eastern front, Romania's attempts to desert the Axis and prepare the grounds for an advantageous, less catastrophic peace with the Western allies and so on; are altogether issues that are equally significant and helpful in understanding the process that ultimately led to Romania's disengagement from the Nazi Final Solution. Most if not all of them have been already considered and sometimes reconsidered by other historians, overestimated or, conversely, underestimated. In an attempt not to double the efforts of other scholars, though I realize that it is rather unlikely to succeed entirely, I will place and analyze the above-mentioned factors in a wider, European context. The dynamic of the Final Solution at large, the Nazi perspective on the events, their plans, expectation and so on; might help in understanding some inner developments of Romania's semi-independent genocide.

A Romania free of Jews and other ethnic and religious minorities was for Ion Antonescu and his regime a major political aspiration and a historical legacy for the future generations of Romanians. As a result, starting with June 1941 the Romanian government, backed by state institutions and agencies, implemented an ethnic cleansing policy that took them, step by step, from selective mass killing to ghettoization, deportations, evacuations, finally emigration, a former, long-abandoned by that time, Nazi strategy². Some three hundred thousands Romanian and Ukrainian Jews died along the road, with yet another three hundred thousands surviving the war as Romania's government decided at a certain moment to fail its ally standards and radical policy, and disengage with the Final Solution, a decision that was motivated less by humanitarianism and more by domestic and international protests and interventions, massive bribe, and a rapidly changing military and political situation³.

From late 1942 onward, in Romania, political and military tactics and calculation gradually downplayed radical, eliminationist anti-Semitism, without totally

¹ Mihail SEBASTIAN, *Jurnal. 1935-1944*, Leon VOLOVICI (ed.), Humanitas, București, pp. 409, 410, 436, 456, 464, 468, 471, 474, 517.

² Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, Bolder, New York, 1990, p. 226. Also Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile germano-române. 1938-1944*, Romanian transl. by S. Neagoe, Editura Humanitas, București, 1994, p. 283.

³ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 2007, p. 349.

eradicating it – up to 1944, at least Ion Antonescu continued to justify his “righteous policy” in terms of revenge and survival, repeatedly expressing his regrets that he refrained from deporting all Jews from Romania¹. Romania’s abrupt and unforeseen defection took the Germans by surprise. Nazi officials never gave up hope, continued to sway, pressure and, finally, even threaten the Romanians to hand over their Jews, and advised the Antonescu government to stay in line with the implementation of the Final Solution as it was already too late for them to persuade the Western allies on their innocence when it comes to the Holocaust². Yet, stubbornly refusing to loose initiative and control over their Jews at the hands of the Nazi bureaucrats, a situation they disliked as it portrayed them as puppets and ordinary Executioneries, some of the Romanians continued with the desperate efforts to constantly depart from the Nazi plan, bravely opposing when not cunningly mocking German diplomats and the SS.

By late 1941, the Romanian ethnic cleansing operations in Bessarabia and North Bukovina, a combination of random and selective mass killing and deportations to Transnistria, a region where the Romanian government decided to collect the Jews as to latter push them over the Bug river, into Russia, where it was for the Germans to “finish the job”, were rapidly coming to an end³. The Romanians were speeding the deportations, without realizing that the Germans were unable and unprepared to cope with the situation. At a moment the Germans had no other solution than to persuade the Romanians to operate more systematically, as to slow down the action⁴. Soon thereafter, with the Romanians having in mind a Jewish Question solved in an overnight process, anxious to turn to the Jews of Regat, Banat, and Southern Transylvania as to “make room for Romanian refugees”⁵, and with Transnistria overcrowded and a bureaucratic night mare, it was not difficult for the Germans to convince the two Antonescu to accept a new plan: deportation to Lublin area. By the end of July 1942 the two parts reached an agreement to start the deportation with September 10. The rest was but a matter of technicalities and formalities to be latter on settled by bureaucrats – Radu Lecca’s visit to Berlin was designed to bring for the final arrangements⁶. Once the decision has been taken, with not one opposing it in Bucharest (nor in Berlin), there were no reasons for the German part to fear, or at least doubt that the Romanians would change their mind. The only, otherwise small but not insignificant, problems underlined in the case of Romania were the high level of widespread corruption, and the way Romanians defined Jewish ness in terms of religion rather than race. As for the rest, in

¹ ANIC, Fond PCM, dosar 166/1940, file 98-99.

² Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 699-702; also Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 450-451, 483; Jean ANCEL, “Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania”, in Mihail IONESCU, Liviu ROTMAN (eds.), *The Holocaust and Romania. History and Contemporary Significance*, Editura Semne, București, 2003, pp. 100-101. Romanians went as far with their attempts to improve Romania’s image in the West as to falsify and destroy documents. Ancel explains the differences between Romanian and German reports on the same events this way. Though, the possibility of Germans writing reports when also distorting facts as to suit their interest (i.e. protect careers) should not be eluded.

³ Jean ANCEL, “Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania”, cit, pp. 93-98.

⁴ Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 304-305; Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol. IV, New York-Jerusalem, 1985-1986, doc. 148, p. 293.

⁵ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 168.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

Romania, like in Slovakia and Croatia, and unlike in Hungary, there was no need to send an adviser (and expert) on the Jewish Question¹. Some of the Nazis were that trustful as to rush to announce publicly that Romania will be soon (read 1943) turned "free of Jews", thus setting, once more, an example for other countries to follow². Yet, unexpectedly, on October 13, 1942, the Romanian government decided to halt deportations, and without announcing the decision publicly³. The Germans were to find out only latter about the ally drew back. What went wrong for the Nazi's? Armin Heinen considers that the existing social and economic bounds, and the same network of relations and structures that prevented the radicalization of Romanian anti-Semitism before the war, worked for the strategy of some Jewish leaders and as to stop the deportations to Poland⁴. I am personally inclined to think that hazard played an equally significant role in the decision-making process. "Rational choice" shaped the new strategic logic of the Romanians yet, up to August 1944, at least when it comes to the fate of the Jews, nothing was everlastingly settled. Keeping in mind that the Nazis had the means and strength to impose their visions by coercion, at least as much as to secure compliance, structures, rational choice, even bravery would not have sufficed.

Romanians stood on the Nazi side in the genocidal mire, and huge proportions of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews perished at the hands of the Romanian government. Ion Antonescu knew directly from Hitler, and from the very beginning, that the "Job was thought and dirty". Yet, he decided to give up human feelings and compassion. There was little or no need for any form of German participation to "cleanse the ground" as violence was triggered by the degree of local anti-Semitism existing before the war, backed by anger, bigotry, opportunism, materialism, careerism and military discipline. With Odessa, the greatest massacre in the entire Holocaust, Romanian mass killings turned genocidal⁵, reaching a pick only to slow down thereafter. Moreover, the perspective changed dramatically once the Romanian government turned to the Jews of Regat, Transylvania and Banat.

One major explanation for the Romanian shift and rift would be that the killings were gradually turning geopolitically disadvantageous. The Western allies let Bucharest know from the very beginning that they disliked and were disgusted by any form of radical anti-Semitic measures and policy, with the Romanians paying attention and becoming "sensitive" only after Stalingrad⁶. At the beginning of the war against USSR, the situation looked totally different to their eyes due the alliance with an undefeated, even inexpugnable Germany, which left them with the impression of being military powerful and politically untouchable, turning them arrogant enough to remove any barrier and totally disregard potential consequences. That would suffice to make possible the display of lethal violence by a regime aiming to ethnically cleanse the nation.

¹ Gerhard SCHOENBERNER (ed.), *The Wannsee Conference and the Genocide of the European Jews*, Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Berlin, 2002, pp. 107-108, doc. 7, 8, 9.

² "Rumanien wird Judenrein" and "Judenaussiedlung", *Bukarester Tageblatt*, 8 August 1942.

³ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 170.

⁴ Armin HEINEN, "Locul pogromului de la Iași în cadrul Holocaustului Românesc", in George VOICU (ed.), *Pogromul de la Iași, 28-30 iunie 1941. Prologul Holocaustului din România*, Polirom, Iași, 2006, p. 130.

⁵ Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy...cit.*, p. 305

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 306-307.

Another explanation would be that what worked in the case of Bessarabia and Bukovina, did not for the rest of the Romanian provinces, as the government divided its strategy in time and geography over the means to do it. In the East, Romanian army and gendarmerie fought and exterminated the enemy, the "Bolshevik Jew", winning the war and cleansing the land thus going hand in hand. Killing in the east was for the Romanians righteous, by no means a matter of keeping balance between pleasing the Germans and achieving their own goals. The full commitment was ideologically justified and fueled by hatred of Jews, communism, and USSR altogether, and pushed as far as to limit the flexibility toward Western allies, even when it became obvious that Germany was losing the war. In Regat, Transylvania and Banat a different strategy was needed, as Jews were in the eyes of both the authorities and the domestic population not only culturally different, but also less dangerous, less poor, and more integrated than the Jews in the East. Hungarian Jews were perceived as disloyal and as a "fifth column" of the neighboring country, but far less dangerous than the Russian, "Bolshevik Jews". Ion Antonescu himself stated in different moments that the Regat, Transylvania and Banat Jews will not suffer, meaning deported, unless proven as communists or sympathizers of Romania's enemies, England and USA included¹. He also promised since 1941 that, in principle, the government would protect all Jews who were Romanian citizens before 1914². However, those suspected as hostile to Romanian army and people were to be deported as well, with the government alone to decide over who, when, and on what charges is "guilty" or not. Moreover, protection was but temporary, with the fate of all Romanian Jews to be decided later, with the conclusion of the war, as part and by means of an "international...equitable solution to the Jewish question"³. Far from being saved, protected, trusted, the Jews were simply tolerated as long as they accepted to entirely submit to the state and the regime⁴. At the time, February to October 1942, deportation to Poland, and Transnistria, were not totally and forever eliminated from the agenda, at least some personal agendas.

Deportations to Transnistria continued for a short while, and at a slow pace, than stopped. Deportations to Poland never really started, though everything was in place. Were the Romanians losing their appetite and zeal, turning more cautious⁵? Where they pleased with what was already achieved? Where they frightened by the naked reality laying behind the Nazi "international solution", a concept used as to deceive their partners and thus bring down any resistance toward deportation to the extermination camps in Poland? This hypothesis is not to be excluded as the initial understanding by the Romanian government of an international solution eluded the full extent of Nazi policy and goals from late 1941 onward.

The invasion in Russia took many of the leaders of the Third Reich from plans of expulsion and commensurate population decimation as the central vision and

¹ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...* cit., p. 283.

² Dinu C. GIURESCU, *România în al doilea război mondial*, cit., p. 144.

³ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944*, vol. III, 1940-1942: *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, Hassefer, București, 1997, pp. 126-127, doc. 428.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 126-127, 175-176, doc. 428, 469.

⁵ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 478-479. Most of Antonescu's followers within the second and third echelons were not fanatics, mono-maniacally obsessed with the Jewish question, but rather bigoted, violent, corrupted, opportunistic, less zealous and lacking racial conceptions, like the Slovaks.

solution toward a Europe free of Jews to systematic total extermination¹. Previous short and long range "plans for the settlement of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe after the conclusion of peace", including overseas evacuation and the creation of reservations in a territory in the East "yet to be determined"², were rapidly abandoned. Nazi demographic engineering, fanciful but impossible to carry out, was to be replaced by a new policy³. Somewhere between July and October 1941 Nazi anti-Semitic policy shifted rapidly from emigration and expulsion to physical extermination⁴. By November 1941 Chelmo and Belzec were already operational, and the plan announced even to the press, though it was not quite clear if the comprehensive program of deportation to the General Government also meant physical extermination. By early 1942, with the Final Solution in full swing, most Nazi "pencil pushers" and "expertocrats", even the "stuffy old Foreign ministry", departed from previous plans of forced emigration and relocation, and begin thinking of the *unthinkable* as something that can and has to be achieved⁵. Yet, with the Wannsee Conference making clear the method, priorities, coordination, tasks, jurisdictions and so on⁶, and with the experts in Jewish matters in all agencies embarking for the newest policy, there were still many not grasping it or at least not knowing exactly whether the start was real or false⁷. Moreover, some top Nazis even resisted the Final Solution and rebelled against the Führer, "cautiously feeling their way and with not a little cynical double-dealing"⁸. Considerable room for criticism, initiatives, and limited opposition to policies sanctioned by Hitler was still possible when and if backed by other recognized needs and priorities such as the war effort, shortages of labor force, strengthening or preserving alliances and so on. Few were able to compre-

¹ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., pp. 255-256, 258. From 1939 the Nazis initiated the fanciful *General Plan East*, developed in five stages, and revised three times, turning demographic engineering into a major radical operation. The plan proved technically unworkable, and turned into an invitation to serial genocide. By November 1941 the RSHA drafted a version that called for resettlement of no less than 31 millions from all West areas to the East, with the "undesirables" to be replaced by 10 million ethnic Germans. By April 1942 the Reich ministry for occupied Eastern Area was in charge with the implementation of this plan, which is, most probably, the plan Mihai Antonescu referred to latter on, when emphasizing the lack of logic from part of the Nazis who opposed deportation to Transnistria and evacuation of Jews over the Bug.

² *Ibidem*, p. 247.

³ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, University of Nebraska Press, Yad Vashem, Lincoln, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 102-106.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 424. Emigration was forbidden by October, on orders issued by Heinrich Müller, the head of Gestapo. The same month, even before, the first deportation from Berlin, Vienna, Prague and the overcrowded ghettos of Poland started.

⁵ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 256.

⁶ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision Concerning the Final Solution", in François FURET (ed.), *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*, Schocken Books, New York, 1989, p. 112.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 105, 118. In October the pieces were falling together and the decision was confirmed. The plan was signaled since July, but the organized anarchy and Byzantine style of the government that cultivated uncertainty delayed the initiation of the Final Solution for months.

⁸ Heinz HÖHNE, *The Order of the Death's Head. The Story of Hitler's SS*, Penguin Books, London, 2000, pp. 398-399.

hend the new vision, panoramic and radicalized, and consequently give up the idea, and their vested interests with Germanizing the conquered territories in the East for the next decade, and consolidating the process after generations, as for them the resettlement of ethnic Germans was equally important to solving the Jewish Question¹. The polycratic nature of the "weak dictatorship of consensus"², marked by conflicting policies and personalities, generating paralysis and indecision for a short while³, doubled by the fact that the factories of death were not all ready and working at full capacity, and the supply system was not running properly yet⁴, was but to slow the process in the first months of 1942.

When it came to extracting the Jews from allied and satellite countries, which was no easy task in some cases, with agreements to be reached and sensibilities not to be hurt, other delays occurred. One major explanation comes with the fact that the SS and the Foreign Office were rather competing than working together, going into a conflict generated by the SS attempts to fully control the operations, and the diplomats efforts to preserve their jurisdiction⁵. Second, the Others Jews were not a priority for the Germans at the very beginning, with the Jews from the *Altreich*, Austria, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, than Wartegau, targeted as the first for "evacuation" in the General Government. Furthermore, Roma and Sinti, and Poles were to follow, with the Nazis never to fell short of victims. Therefore, no rush was needed when it came to other countries and territories, at least not at an early stage⁶.

When it comes to Romania, and from a present day perspective, one can say that the Nazis "missed the moment". However, at the time, they had no reason to worry as Romania was doing fine, being advanced, setting an example for others in terms of willingness to deal rapidly with its Jews. By late 1941 the impression left by the Romanian's speeded killings and deportations was that all barriers have been removed, with the Antonescu government anxious to settle the Jewish Question in a matter of months, and not with "the victorious conclusion of war against USSR", as it was initially envisioned in Berlin⁷. Nevertheless, Romanian Jews were not included in the first wave of deportations because of the existing inner conflicts within Nazi circles of decision makers. In spite of Franz Rademacher efforts, "who went beyond compliance", to have the deportations approved by the Romanians, Undersecretary of state Martin Luther, his immediate superior, sent the affirmative answer from the Romanian government to Adolf Eichmann

¹ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution*...cit. pp. 108-109.

² Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 241.

³ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 336. Facing opposition from the government on various issues concerning the German but not East Jews Hitler had to force the hand of Reichstag and impose a second Enabling Act in April 1942, granting him unlimited powers, placing Führer's principles above law.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 490-492. From a logistical point of view, the deportations were a constant factor of stress, at least up to 1943, gave head aches to the Nazis, who never had enough trains, not exactly when they needed them, as the *Reichsbahn* was failing short with providing sufficient freight cars as there were always other priorities. See also Raul HILBERG, "The Bureaucracy of Annihilation", in François FURET (ed.), *Unanswered Questions*...cit., pp. 123-125.

⁵ Heinz HÖHNE, *The Order of the Death's Head*...cit., p. 281.

⁶ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision Concerning the Final Solution", cit., pp. 114-115.

⁷ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 250.

only on 10 January 1942¹. From a Nazi perspective this did not mean too late, as the deportation and extermination of Romanian Jews became a priority only with August 1942, when they were included on Himmler's agenda². Meanwhile, Romania was placed in the same group of countries with Slovakia and Croatia, with Slovakia turned this time by the Nazis' wishful thinking into a role model³. Manfred Von Killinger and Franz Rademacher were sent to Romania to continue the fruitful work they started in Slovakia, where they prepared the ground for deportations up to the moment when they were able to give green light to RSHA, with "the Slovak government to be consulted out of courtesy"⁴.

By October 1942, Bucharest was crowded with German experts and advisers for the Romanian government, some German Police officers included, all pushy and opened to collaboration, ready to help the Romanian government directly⁵. As Gustav Richter's detailed reports indicate, a lot of "paper work" has been done in advance by both Nazis and Romanian agencies as to speed and insure the success of the planned deportations⁶. With time passing by, and no trains leaving for Poland from Romania, the Germans started to put more and more pressure on the Romanians, later on even threats. Met with increasing opposition by some members of the Romanian government and administration, at least the Bucharest based experts and diplomats could do nothing but watch, write reports to Berlin, protest, finally turning more and more frustrated with each and every failed attempt to take over control and physically police the Romanian Jews to Lublin area. Romania was no occupied or satellite country, but an ally, which forced many of them to be prudent, as too much pressure over the Romanians to hand over their Jews might have jeopardized the military alliance and Romania's economic contributions to the war effort. Killinger's briefings with Mihai Antonescu, and the reports sent to Berlin by SS *Hauptsturmführer* Richter, point to the fact that they were both aware and concerned with the evolution of Jewish Question in Romania, and the interventions of some Romanians in favor of the Jews. However, all they could do was to threaten that time will come for the "saboteurs" to pay the bill⁷. Not even top diplomats in Berlin, such as Luther, could do more than attempting to persuade the Romanians that a radical change of their policy toward the Jews would not improve Romania's image worldwide, but only indicate a crack in the Axis, and weakness from the part of Bucharest leaders⁸. As for the SS, Himmler, Heydrich, Müller, Eichmann, they were hands tight, as they could only work for details but not decide on German Grand Policy and high diplomacy. It was the Führer's job to come up with the "broad brushstrokes" and the final decisions, as

¹ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution*...cit. pp. 379-380.

² Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 480, 483.

³ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol*...cit., p. 281. Also Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 373. The Slovak scenario was to be followed in Romania and other countries as well.

⁴ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 637, 643.

⁵ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents*...cit., vol. IX, pp. 461-463. For the Order Police and its role as one of the main instruments in the implementation of the Final Solution see Raul HILBERG, "The Bureaucracy of Annihilation", cit., pp. 124-126.

⁶ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents*...cit., vol. IV, pp. 197-202.

⁷ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriți*, partea a II-a, cit., pp. 264-265, doc. 548. They went as far as to make their threats public, writing articles on the Romanian slaves of the Jews. See "Judenknechte", *Bukarester Tageblatt*, 11 October 1942.

⁸ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol*...cit., p. 283.

he was the only one having a panoramic view, and the only one that could operate at the top level of Antonescu, Horthy, Tiso, Petain and others, issuing authorizations concerning the politically extremely sensitive operation of extracting the Jews from other countries¹.

As Helen Fein's study points out, direct German rule and SS control over deportations counted more than everything else in the implementation of the Final Solution². Comparing the cases of Romania and Bulgaria on one hand, with Slovakia and Hungary on the other, would be more than sufficient, both illustrative and illuminating. However, the SS never succeeded in getting more than agreements with the Romanian government, though since June 1941 they repeatedly attempted to take control and coordinate the operations entirely – selective mass killing and deportations from Bessarabia and Bukovina at the time³. The Romanians refused to surrender their prerogatives, and SS intrigues and intrusions in Romania's domestic policy were utterly rejected. Pride was one factor, distrust from Ion Antonescu toward the "black tunics" another. The Romanian *Conducător* preferred to rely more on the Foreign Office for the simple fact that German diplomats interventions liberated him from prison in 1940, and latter on, in January 1941 German diplomacy "put the money" on the General, while the SS supported the fascist, legionar coupe⁴. From that moment ahead Antonescu had but contempt for the SS, suspected them of working with his *legionari* enemies, and as to jeopardize his position⁵. The only person who had the means and skills to intervene in favor of the SS, like in Hungary, changing Horthy with a puppet regime as to finally tackle the Jewish question, was Hitler⁶. Yet, Hitler preferred to continue to persuade Antonescu, and personally lived with the impression that he succeeded in his efforts, that the Jews are the archenemy that ultimately have to be destroyed⁷. Consequently, Romania was not occupied, though the plan to do so in the case of an eventual defection existed. There were even good reasons for Hitler to order so since April 1943, when he informed Antonescu on tentative approaches by Romanian ministries to the Western allies, and complained and disapproved the Romanian mild anti-Semitic measures⁸. Coming from Hitler's part, not to put some iron in the glove could only mean that he was convinced that the glove was made of iron itself. As a matter of fact, Antonescu's loyalty and the support of the Romanian army were never doubt by Hitler, not even after he refused to offer the Romanians some satisfaction while returning North Transylvania back to Romania. Antonescu was not only an ally but also an accomplice, the only foreign statesman to whom Hitler was ready to tell in advance about the attack on USSR and the war of annihilation to be carried out there, as the Romanian army "had to be put broadly into the picture". Possibly, Hitler felt that no harsher terms were needed

¹ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, pp. 630-631.

² Helen FEIN, *Accounting for Genocide*, Free Press, New York, 1979.

³ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 64.

⁴ Heinz HÖHNE, *The Order of the Death's Head...cit.*, pp. 289-290.

⁵ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, pp. 62-63. See also Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști, partea a II-a, cit.*, pp. 24-25, 29, doc. 359, 364.

⁶ Ian KERSHAW, *Hitler. 1936-1945: Nemesis*, vol. 2, Penguin Books, London, 2000, pp. 627-628. Also Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 405.

⁷ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 636. On August 5, 1944, Hitler made a last attempt to persuade Antonescu change his mind and deport the Romanian Jews.

⁸ Ian KERSHAW, *Hitler...cit.*, pp. 582-583.

when it came to the Romanians Jews as he might have hoped that the episode of June-October 1941, when Antonescu "unleashed his thirsting for revenge troops" and allowed horrifying massacres as to offer satisfaction to the Romanian people and army, would genuinely repeat itself¹.

Before deportation of the Romanian Jews to Poland (Lublin area) to take shape, Romanians implemented, somewhat independently, other, similar plans. By July 1941 the Romanian government thought to deport all Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and some counties of Moldova to Transnistria. "Bolshevik" Jews and many others from the Regat, Transylvania and Banat were to be deported as well soon thereafter. No preparations have been made, as deportation was only temporary, Transnistria but a dumping ground, with the Jews to be evacuated shortly (pushed, thrown, as the perpetrators put it) over the Bug River, into USSR². Speeding the process on their own, they could not realize that, with the advent of Barbarossa, Hitler, Himmler, and Rosenberg turned Russia into a fated land of German expansion, where no expulsion of Jews was to be allowed, and where the existing Jewish population was to be exterminated³. Uninformed as they were, they could not grasp the logic of the Germans, pushing back the Jews deported to Moghilev in July, shooting 12 000 out of 25 000. With Transnistria conquered and turned into a territory under Romanian administration, Romanians continued to deport there the "undesirables", still hoping to expel them latter to Russia. By August 1941 Mihai Antonescu informed the Romanian cabinet on his previous discussions with several Nazi officials – rather third echelon experts, probably Richter, than high-ranking officials, as he put it – concerning the implementation of an "international solution" to the Jewish Question, meaning evacuation to the East. Up to December 1941 Ion Antonescu continued to think that "the question of the Yids is being discussed in Berlin. The Germans want to bring the Yids from Europe to Russia and settle them in certain areas, but there is still time before this plan is carried out"⁴.

This was no Romanian dreadful imagination at work, only "wishful thinking" based on a former Nazi plan from 1939-1940. The Romanians knew about it since June 1940, when the Ion Gigurtu cabinet expressed his intention to collaborate with the Germans and solve the Jewish Question by means of evacuation and relocation to the East, where a reservation for the European Jews was to be created⁵. However, by mid 1941, the plan was already outdated as a new vision emerged from within the leadership of the Third Reich, somewhat bringing the Romanian policy of ethnic cleansing to a deadlock⁶. As to find a way out, Romanians were to be persuaded to give up expediency, halt deportations, renounce their plans and instead accept the new German solution and method⁷. With Ion Antonescu determined to move further and deport all Jews from Romania to Transnistria, resiliently stating that nothing was to stop him at a national and European level from doing so, German experts working as advisers for the Romanian government had to

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 383-384.

² Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit, p. 98.

³ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...*cit., p. 109.

⁴ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...*cit., pp. 64-67.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944*, vol. II, *Problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de miniștri*, Hassefer, București, 1996, p. 365, doc 126., see also ASB, Fond PCM, Cabinet, dosar 478/1941 file 110,112, 120, 153, 158, 239.

⁶ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...*cit., pp. 280-281.

⁷ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 678-686.

make sustainable efforts as to convince the Romanian *Conducător's* henchmen to deport the Jews from Regat and Transylvania to Poland¹.

In late 1941 Radu Lecca and Gustav Richter convinced Mihai Antonescu to create the *Centrala*, a new agency that was to facilitate the coordination and control of the Romanian government of Jewish activities, organize forced labor, and collect contribution for the war effort². By March 1942 Franz Rademacher tested, once more, the readiness of the Romanian government to deport its Jews, and with some promising result. Romanian Jews living outside Romania, in European countries under German control were abandoned at the hand of the Nazis³. With Romania soon to be included in the continental wide Final Solution, the Nazis wanted to make it sure that they are not to be met with resistance.

During the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 this was one of the main issues to be discussed, with Martin Luther, Undersecretary of state of the Foreign Office ensuring Heydrich that the path was cleared in South Eastern Europe with none of the governments there to create any problems to the RSHA when it comes to deporting their Jews⁴. In the case of Romania, previous attitudes and developments indicated but willingness and openness from the Romanians to collaborate with the Germans. By that time, the Romanians already deported more than half of their Jews, with Mihai Antonescu writing personally to Himmler, asking him to send his expert, Gustav Richter, whose expertise "proved essential", back to Romania⁵. True, Romanians were not ready to fully give up their prerogatives and jurisdiction, as they were still longing for a Romanian solution, in some respects different from the German one⁶. To Heydrich and his always suspicious RSHA this was a soundly indicator of the Romanian government reluctance, even opposition to the new policy. For Killinger, informing the Foreign Office in September 1941 that Heydrich's report is inaccurate, as the Romanians proved to be radical, it was simply a matter of time, and preparations⁷. By November 1941, even Killinger, the "trouble-shooter", was to inform Berlin that the Romanians are somewhat double-crossing them, that the only to be trusted in Bucharest is Ion Antonescu, with the rest of the Romanian politicians and the bourgeoisie being rather anti-German⁸.

With July 1942 doubts vanished once more, with Mihai Antonescu issuing an order coming directly from Ion Antonescu: the Jews of Banat and South Transylvania were soon to be deported to Poland. Moreover, German agencies together with the Romanian ones were to carry it out⁹. Gustav Richter rushed to let his superiors in Berlin that he accomplished his mission. By 26 July Heydrich and even Eichmann were informed that the preparations started, and that, following the Slovak scenario, deportations will begin with September 10, 1942¹⁰. Able-bodied Jews were to be deported to forced labor, loosing Romanian citizenship and assets once

¹ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., pp. 98-99.

² Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 689.

³ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit. p. 379.

⁴ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...* cit., pp. 325-326.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea I-a, cit., p. 383, doc. 274.

⁶ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...* cit., pp. 326-7.

⁷ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, cit., pp. 7-8, doc. 343.

⁸ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...* cit., p. 328.

⁹ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...* cit., p. 282.

¹⁰ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 692.

they cross the border¹. Some German officials, such as Martin Luther, were still displeased with the "general attitude" of the Romanian government and by the too many exempted from deportation categories of Jews. Yet, the proposed strategy was not to put further pressure on the Romanians who, "in principle" were going in line with the German plan. Instead, Radu Lecca was to be invited to Berlin to work with the Nazi bureaucrats on the last details². In the meantime, several German newspapers edited in Romania and the *Reich* announced publicly the "inevitable deportation" of the Romanian Jews, with the Romanian press refraining from doing so³. What made the difference between the Romanian and the German attitude remains somewhat unclear. Further developments suggest that for the Romanian government the success of the entire operation was conditioned by secrecy more than anything else. At the same time, the Nazis had to propagandistically advertise each and every military, political, diplomatic and ideological success of the regime, as to let the domestic population back home that Germany is not alone, that trustworthy allies are fighting on its side, and so on and so forth. Finally, a certain dosage of typical Nazi arrogance, in this particular case coming at least from Gustav Richter, is not to be eluded.

Invited to Berlin for August "to sort out the details", Radu Lecca, the head of the Romanian Jewish Commissariat "was brusquely treated by Foreign Ministry officials, who thought they were discussing details with an oily rag rather than making decision with a ship's officer"⁴. Franz Rademacher, the Jewish expert of the Foreign Office, and Luther's direct subordinate was the only official who took the time to talk to Lecca. This time it was not only for arrogance and infatuation to ruin the Nazi plans. The existing conflict between RSHA and the Foreign Office⁵, as well as the fact that out of "clumsiness" Martin Luther missed to inform his superiors on the issues discussed at Wannsee – going with the wind, a perfect opportunist and careerist, Luther wanted but to secure a personal jurisdiction and thus improve his position within the ministry –, offended not only Lecca, but also Ion Antonescu. For the Romanian *Conducător* the way his envoy was treated in Berlin was indicative for the German general perception of Romania as a second rate ally and easy to handle executant (and executioner), and not an equal partner. For Antonescu, a vainglorious military and authoritarian politician with a "studied independence", suspicious toward and annoyed by any Nazi intrigue, intrusion, and pressure, this incident might have made the difference between deporting or not the Jews of Regat, Banat and Transylvania to Poland⁶. Anyhow, his decision to halt the operation was not a matter of humanistic self-reflection over deeds and terrifying outcomes.

With Lecca's return from Berlin, the general attitude of the Romanian government changed, but the "diplomatic incident" cannot explain it entirely⁷. The Germans, first the Bucharest legation, than Berlin, continued to hope and be pushy, as long as to their mind the negotiations with the Romanian part were concluded.

¹ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...*cit., p. 282, also Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...*cit., pp. 328-329.

² Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 693.

³ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...*cit., pp. 329-30.

⁴ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...*cit., p. 659.

⁵ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...*cit., p. 282, nota 51

⁶ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...*cit., p. 338.

⁷ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 694-695.

Conversely, and somewhat unexpectedly, Romanian officials start claiming that the deportations have to be postponed, the plans studied and worked in further details, and the operation launched "when the time will come"¹. For someone familiarized with the "back and forth" oscillation of Romanian policy, and with the deportations starting as to be stopped shortly after, the situation must have been unpleasant but not desperate. Unless, but, fortunately for the targeted victims, this was not the case, the Germans would have realized that by mid to late 1942 the Romanians were gradually turning disappointed, losing their enthusiasm and initial exuberance². Contradictions and even conflicts between cabinet members and decision makers soon sparked, as some realized that they have to be more cautious. The fact that the "secret of deportations" to Lublin was out days after the discussions between Mihai Antonescu and Nazi officials, with roomers spreading fast – seemingly, the information transpired from the *Centrala* and clerks of the Romanian Railways –, generating a wave of intervention and protests, was one good reason to do so. On September 29, 1942, Mihai Antonescu informed his close associates that the Jews found out the secret, a proof of how much infiltrated and dangerous they can be, also spreading lies and creating panic – local authorities in Banat were frightened at the time that German refugees from Germany will be brought instead³. However, the plans to deport the Jews, "hundreds of thousands of them", with "one hundred thousand in Bucharest alone", were not abandoned, as they were nonetheless the envisaged solution to pressing problems – such as making room for Romanians, whether refugees or not. Initiatives coming from bureaucrats working at both the central and local level were to reach Lecca's office who, on his turn, far from rejecting or opposing, was to ensure them that according to the state policy "all Jews that are not useful to Romanian economy are to be evacuated to Poland"⁴. The only problem at the time was generated by the indecision of the cabinet whether to deport the Jews, "too many and too dangerous for public order and state security", to Poland and/or Transnistria, Romania's General Government⁵.

On September 22, 1942, Mihai Antonescu met Hitler, Ribbentrop, and German army commanders in Vinnytsa, Hitler's new headquarter in Ukraine, at a conference organized to analyze the situation on the Eastern front, but not only. As usually, Hitler asked for more but refused to offer something, from military equipment to political satisfaction – in the case of Romania, his promise to return North Transylvania with the victorious end of the war. The issue of deporting the Jews to Poland was also touched, with Ribbentrop intervening for the first time since the beginning of the negotiation, insisting that Romania should keep its promises, and with Antonescu not refusing him openly⁶. In some respects, it looked like when the German Foreign Minister found out about Hitler's plans and wishes for sure, and I would say, too late⁷. Days latter, a somewhat irritated and panicked Ribbentrop

¹ AMAE, Fond 33, dosar 17, fila 100.

² Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 695.

³ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Problema evreiască...* cit., p. 441, doc 145. Also IDEM, *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, pp. 261-262, doc. 545.

⁴ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...* cit., vol. IV, p. 276.

⁵ AMStM., RSEM.900, C1224.

⁶ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...* cit., pp. 170-171.

⁷ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision Concerning the Final Solution", cit., pp. 101-102, 117. Before that moment, Ribbentrop did not considered necessary to put pressure on Romanians

asked Luther to pressure Germany's south east European allied and satellite countries to deliver their Jews, "to accelerate as much as possible the evacuation" of the "proven" arch-enemies that "incite against us and have to be considered responsible for sabotage acts and assassination attempts"¹. Difficult to say whether Ribbentrop's (re)action was determined by an already predictable at the time Romanian defection. What stays unquestionable is the fact that in less than two months Nazi officials will have good reasons to fear Romania's disengagement from the Final Solution.

For September 26, 1942, a conference was organized in Berlin by the Germans to discuss with the Romanians technical issues regarding the transportation of the Romanian Jews to Poland². Though invited to attend the conference, most probably long before, the experts of the Romanian railways (CFR) did not knew anything about, therefore asking the Romanian Ministry of Interior, and latter Radu Lecca, for details, only as to receive no clear answer in time³. The official response reached CFR only later, on November 4, informing the experts that Ion Antonescu decided on October 13 to halt deportations⁴. Meanwhile, the conference took place, as scheduled, and in the absence of the Romanians, with the Germans deciding on their own, and thus offending the Romanians once more, that 250 000 Romanian Jews were to be deported to Belzec at a pace of 2000 every two days⁵. There were nonetheless good reasons for the Germans to do so, as they knew already that they cannot and should not rely much on the Romanian bureaucracy, but solely on Ion Antonescu. On October 10, an order issuing from the Marshall's cabinet instructed the Ministry of Interior to start deportations from Banat and South Transylvania. All of a sudden, the very next day, Antonescu reconsidered his position, and decided to halt the action. Formally, the reason to "postpone" deportation for the spring of 1943 was to avoid the difficulties of the rainy season, and winter⁶. Unofficially, some direct interventions from prominent Jewish leaders to General Picki Vasiliu, nonetheless the conflict between the later and Lecca, with Vasiliu attempting to put the head of the Romanian Jewish Commissariat in a bad light and reduce his influence, counted more than any logistical concern⁷. Soon, it became obvious that the Romanians decided to leave the German path

with regard the Jewish question. Luther did not informed Ribbentrop on the Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution in an attempt to secure a better position for him. Piqued by the SS intrusion, and encroachment of his ministry jurisdiction, he gave orders to his subordinates not to pressure Germany's allies with regard deportations. This is also to explain why only from late 1942-early 1943 he got personally involved with this particular issue. This was no unusual situation considering the inner rivalry of the Third Reich, with chieftains fighting to expand their private empires, anticipating and pursuing what they thought to be Hitler's desires, sometimes erroneously, and with Hitler trying not to antagonize nor alienate any of them, not even the ones he considered incompetent, Ribbentrop included.

¹ Quoted in Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 450.

² Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...*cit., vol. IV, p. 250

³ ASB, Fond PCM, dosar 342/1942

⁴ Dinu C. GIURESCU, *România în al doilea război mondial*, cit., p. 144.

⁵ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...*cit., p. 335.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 336.

⁷ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 450. See also Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriți*, partea a II-a, p. 260, doc. 544. On the 29 September Lecca also send a letter of response to the directors of CFR insuring them that Marshal ordered the evacuation of all Jews, and that the Ministry of Interior is working the details under the direct supervision and coordination of Mihai Antonescu.

and "Rosenberg's arguments", as the civilized world was "keeping an eye on Romania, protesting against the maltreatment, deportations, and killings"¹.

By late October 1942, with the situation already tense, Mihai Antonescu was telling Gustav Richter that he does not understand the lack of logic of Berlin, insisting on deportation of Romanian Jews to Poland, at the same time rejecting any evacuation of Jews in Transnistria over the Bug². In less than a month, during another talk, Mihai Antonescu went that far as to let Richter know that he is personally against any act of barbarity, criticizing the abuses and crimes of the past, denying the responsibility of the government, deflecting it toward the lower echelons of Romanian Executioneries in Transnistria and the local German Police³. No less anti-Semitic when it came to economic reforms and emigration, and only 16 months after the terrible massacres in Bessarabia and Bukovina, the man advocating ethnic cleansing by mass killing and expulsion, turned his logic up side down, introducing to an exasperated German expert and adviser no less than seven major reasons for the Romanian government to halt deportations and depart the German plan⁴.

Driven by opportunism more than ideology, Romanians realized by late 1942, early 1943 that they were "passengers on a sinking boat"⁵. After Stalingrad, losing hope forever, they reconsidered their position, and made it that way as to let the Germans know that they changed their mind. By January 1943 a report written by Heinrich Müller was that pessimistic that Himmler turned convinced that nothing more could be done in Romania, nonetheless deciding to call Gustav Richter back home⁶. In late 1943, Radu Lecca stepped down from his position, thereafter working as a second rank clerk for the Ministry of National Labor⁷. With the spring of 1944 German anti-Semitic propaganda was not longer accepted by the Romanian government, who went that far as to banish the activity of German experts sent to Bucharest to reinvigorate it⁸. Last but not least, the commission in charge with deportations was working on repatriation of Jews from Transnistria⁹.

To the very end Ion Antonescu continued to hate the Jews, the generic Jewish Enemy, "with glasses on his nose, observing everything, noticing the military situation and informing the enemies of Romania", with yet several members of his cabinet trying to temper him, advancing impossible solutions, and taking advantage that the Marshal did not wanted and could not afford to alienate his last followers. Though, on several occasions he went that far as to threaten his henchmen, accusing them for being protectors of the Jews, stressing the fact that "the army knows" and eventually might seek revenge, as in 1941¹⁰. Never entirely departing his creeds, the *Conducător* continued to give interviews in *Porunca Vremii*, revolving to the same old theme and obsession¹¹. When lucid, though rarely, he

¹ ASB, Fond PCM, dosar 473, vol. II, file 854-869.

² Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 696.

³ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 450-451. See also Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, pp. 273-274, doc. 556.

⁴ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...*cit., pp. 336-337.

⁵ Heinz HÖHNE, *The Order of the Death's Head*, cit., p. 396.

⁶ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 697.

⁷ *Ibidem*, cit., p. 673.

⁸ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...*cit., p. 285.

⁹ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...*cit., p. 339.

¹⁰ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Problema evreiască ...*cit., pp. 554-555, 557, doc. 186, 187.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 499, doc. 160.

realized that Romania might lose the war. Even then, he continued to translate democracy as "Judeocracy", and gave up radical anti-Semitic measures only as to "lift the burden from the shoulders of the next generations of Romanians"¹. At the same time he did not give up the idea to cleanse Romania of all ethnic minorities in the aftermath of an eventually victorious end of the war, turning the Romanian nation in perfect homogenous body, and constantly opposed the repatriation of Jews from Transnistria, as the Romanians would "stone" him for doing so². Surprised that as many as 60 000 Jews were still alive in Transnistria in late 1943, somewhat panicked, asking his ministries to prevent further assassinations by the Germans on Romanian administrated soil, as he would be made responsible, Antonescu resiliently refused to protect the "ingrate, vengeful nation, plotting continuously against the Romanians, who treated them humanely and even saved them from an imminent death"³.

Romania's case is not that special, and definitely not singular, though to some it might look so. Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia also stepped back when they realized the full extend of the Final Solution, halting the deportation temporary or for good, depending on the same factors: interventions, protests, situation on the front, defections within the Nazi decision-makers circles and chain of command, and so on⁴. Finally, direct SS involvement in the operation made the difference, counting more that pre-existing local anti-Semitism and the status of the respective country vis-a-vis Germany. In Romania, a successful *coup d'État* in August 1944 put an end to any further developments and potential German intervention, even occupation, forcing the Germans to withdraw without having enough time to massacre more Jews and organize the deportations on their own⁵.

The situation of the Romanian Jews living Romania with the mid 1930s as to end trapped in German controlled countries with 1940-1941 is no less illustrative for my case study. It indicates some goal of the initial anti-Semitic cleansing policy, the reasons behind the late 1942-1943 shift, and the limits of the Romanians attempt to protect its Jews.

From the very beginning Romanians expressed no interest on the return of their Jews, on contrary. Not necessary thankful like the Croats, they had an attitude similar to the Slovaks, who only "fretted over their claim to the property left behind"⁶. With May 1941 the Romanian government repealed citizenship to all Romanian Jews outside the borders, canceled their passport, and later, in July 1942 handed them to the Germans, to be treated as the rest of the German, Austrian, and French Jews. Raoul Bossy's reports from Berlin on Romanian Jews within the Reich being discriminated and treated worst than other Jews were disregarded by the Romanian Foreign Office⁷. Furthermore, for the sake of the good relations

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 511, 513, doc. 166, 168. Less than a month later he was to say that the interest of the Romanian nation had to be protected no matter how many Jews would die, taking full responsibility in front of history and the United States of America.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 524, 525-529, 534, 541-542, doc. 175, 176, 178, 180.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 526, 551-552, doc. 176, 186.

⁴ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 484-486.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Problema evreiască...cit.*, p. 551, doc. 186. In April 1944 Antonescu speaks of a German invasion into Romania, and the possibility of German troops to engage in further mass killings of Jews.

⁶ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.* p. 379.

⁷ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...cit.*, p. 282.

between Romania and Germany, and of the "international solution" to the Jewish Question, an agreement was signed between Martin Luther and Gheorghe Davidescu, in spite of repeated protests by diplomats to warn Bucharest that the new policy is but to shatter Romania's international prestige¹. Davidescu went that far as to ask Romanian diplomats to end their protests against German policy toward Romanian Jews, and instead to "keep an eye" on the assets confiscated from them². When Eichmann start pressing by July 1942 for a rapid answer, as Jewish refugees from Hungary, Romania, Slovakia were to be deported from Germany, France, Belgium and Holland, smoothly and without meeting any diplomatic opposition³, the Romanian Foreign Office came rapidly with a positive response. By the time, the Foreign Office was acting according to the state policy, which was to "get rid of the Jewish minority as much as possible"⁴.

With 1943 the situation changed. Thousands of visas were issued for Jews to return to Romania, and not to be sent to Transnistria⁵. Attempts were made to offer some protections, and make sure that the Romanian Jews are not discriminated. However, all those efforts were in vain as German authorities resiliently refused to let them return. Moreover, they reminded the Romanian government that they abandoned their Jews long before⁶. Totally unrealistic, Mihai Antonescu and others, sometimes the same diplomats that in 1942 worked with and for the Germans, continued to make (or at least pretended to) diplomatic efforts to protect, liberate and repatriate some Jews, even those that already reached the factories of death⁷. At a certain moment, in 1944, from Berlin, Ion Gheorghe had to ask them halt further interventions, as they were not only counterproductive but also dangerous for Romania, with the Nazis interpreting them as "acts of enmity"⁸.

Documented or not, many (though one might say not enough) interventions, persuasions, bribes, and pressures, coming from Jewish leaders and Organizations, the Vatican, USA, Romanian politicians, the Red Cross and so on; also contributed to the developments that finally made the Romanian disengagement with the Final Solution possible⁹. Most of, but not all personalities and organizations aiming to stop the dreadful machinery are mentioned in a special report requested by Ion Antonescu in late January 1944¹⁰. This is not the first report of that kind, which points to the relevance of all the efforts briefly mentioned above. With the beginning of the killings and deportations, SSI and other state agencies and institutions informed the government on repeated attempts by others to soften the radical anti-Semitic policy¹¹. What was the reason for Antonescu to ask for such a report in early 1944 we might never find out. On one hand it seems that the Romanian leader wanted to know who the saboteurs of his policy were, let the Germans

¹ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 692.

² Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, cit., pp. 367, 373, doc. 616, 622.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 362-363, doc. 613.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 372, doc. 621.

⁵ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, pp. 171-173.

⁶ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Evreii din România între ani 1940-1944*. vol. IV, *Bilanțul tragediei – renașterea speranței*, Hassefer, București, 1998, p. 423, doc. 384.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 424-5, 428, 429, 448, 453, doc. 385, 388, 389, 406, 411.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 452, doc. 410.

⁹ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...cit.*, pp. 335-337.

¹⁰ ASB, Fond PCM, Cabinet, dosar 163/1940, file 87-93.

¹¹ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, cit., pp. 69-70, doc. 383.

know as well, and thus come up with an explanation for failing their expectations. On the other hand it can be a desperate effort to cover his back, letting the Western allies know that he, Ion Antonescu, took into consideration the interventions and halted the actions. However, some previous declarations of the Marshal, from August 1942, point rather to the former¹.

How much each and every intervention counted is also hard to establish. Keeping in mind the context, one would say what Hilberg said in the case of baron Franz von Neumann: "What he did was a major act with a major result"². Or, as Jean Ancel did when analyzing the political opposition and intervention of some democratic leaders such as Iuliu Maniu, Dinu Brătianu, Nicolae Lupu, and others, conclude that "it was decisive and influential"³. Franz von Neumann bribed some officials. Maniu and Lupu acted as a channel of communication between Jewish leaders and organizations, and the Romanian government, persuading the authorities to stop the deportation, and offering them arguments in favor of freezing the process, arguments that were later used by Mihai Antonescu both to oppose the Nazis as well as to persuade the allies: the Jewish question as a Romanian problem, not German, one of the most important and to be solved by Romanian means; stopping the deportations and other radical anti-Semitic policies as to satisfy the atmosphere in the allied camp and thus give Romania a better chance to prepare the peace talks and conditions in the aftermath of the war; Romania acts toward the Jews as Slovakia and Croatia, and unlike Italy and Hungary, thus leaving the international community with the impression that its government is fully dependent on the Third Reich; and so on⁴.

Several Jewish leaders also played a significant role, Wilhelm Filderman being only the most visible, exploiting personal relations and institutional connections, sending memorandums and letters of protests, corrupting, bribing and so on; with, sometimes, his interventions being but "tactical blunders"⁵. However, his role was significant up to the moment when the Federation was disbanded, and Filderman forced to step down⁶, and *Centrala*, a Romanian version of *Judenrat*, supervised by Radu Lecca, acting upon German instructions, and headed by "utterly unrepresentative for the Jewish community (even) controversial" members such as N. Gingold, H.S. Streiman and A. Willman, was created⁷. Thereafter, his role consisted not that much in influencing directly the Romanian government to change their decision to deport the Jews to Poland, but persuading them to continue to take maximum advantage of the economic and financial potential, and know-how of the remaining Jews, thus keeping them alive. Accordingly, Romanian Jews were

¹ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...cit.*, vol X, p. 215.

² Raul HILBERG, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders. The Jewish catastrophe, 1933-1945*, Harper Collins Publisher, New York, 1992, p. 154.

³ Jean ANCEL, "The Opposition to the Antonescu Regime: its Attitude Towards the Jews during the Holocaust", in David BANKIER, Israel GUTMAN (eds.), *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2003, p. 345.

⁴ Jean ANCEL, "The Opposition to the Antonescu Regime", cit., pp. 352-355.

⁵ Bela VAGO, "Contrasting Jewish Leadership in Wartime Hungary and Romania", in Yehuda BAUER, Nathan ROTENSTREICH (eds.), *The Holocaust as a Historical Experience*, Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., New York, 1981, p. 139.

⁶ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, cit., p. 288, doc. 565.

⁷ Bela VAGO, "Contrasting Jewish Leadership in Wartime Hungary and Romania", in cit., pp. 140-142.

not saved by the government, but kept as hostages, as "bargaining chip", nonetheless the source of unimaginable large sums of gold and foreign currency¹.

In a similar way, Alexandru Zissu took advantage of Mihai Antonescu's feverish seek from 1943 onward for a way out of the war, "adroitly exploited the myth of a omnipotent 'Jewish World Power', and hinted to the Romanian prime minister that Jewish organizations might mediate with the allies for Romania"².

Writing reports and protesting against deportations and massacres as with October 1941, persuading and than, with September 1942, directly warning and threatening the Romanian government, efforts by US Embassy in Bucharest and latter the American government, also made the difference³. Arrogantly, the Romanians decided at the beginning to disregard the warnings and ignore the diplomatic pressure by US government, with few refusing to work for and being associated with a government that persecutes the Jews⁴. Nonetheless, unlike Ion Antonescu, Mihai Antonescu was cautious and sensitive from the early days when it came to Romania's image in the USA, asking Romanian diplomats to "counteract Hungarian propaganda on Romanian barbarity", latter "explaining" the actions while reducing them to "some radical measures against the Bolshevik Jews", ending up with denying responsibility for persecutions and pogroms⁵.

Two documents are more than illustrative in this sense. On March 12, 1944, the Romanian ambassador in Ankara informed the Romanian government that three issues make the special interest of the US government, and that a favorable answer from Romanian authorities would be accepted "...with satisfaction, and please the American ambassador, who is more Jewish than American":

1. The repatriation of 50 000 Jews from Transnistria, thus reducing the risk of further massacres by the German army during its withdraw from Russia;
2. Direct support for the emigration of 4500 Jewish children and 500 adults to Palestine;
3. Granting the Jews of Cernowitz the freedom to travel in the event of an imminent evacuation of the region⁶.

Two days later, Mihai Antonescu was to inform the ambassador that starting with March 13 his government decided to repatriate the Jews (and administration from Transnistria) as to avoid massacres similar to those that occurred in 1941. He also expressed his support toward emigration, as he always was in favor and viewed emigration as a solution. Lastly, he expressed personal hope that it will not be the case for Romania to abandon Bukovina (meaning that that the US government will intervene in favor of Romania in the aftermath of the war). The rest of the document is but an astonishing and shameless attempt to improve the image of Romania and himself, an unbelievable positive retrospective of Romania's policy

¹ Even the Nazis saw them this way up to December 1941, when USA entered the war, turning it into a world war, and it would be rather hard to say that they ever attempted to save any Jew. After that moment it was senseless for them to keep Jews as hostages. See Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 583, also Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 250.

² Bela VAGO, "Contrasting Jewish Leadership in Wartime Hungary and Romania", in cit., p. 144.

³ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a I-a, cit., p. 451, doc. 331.

⁴ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...*, cit., p. 333.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, cit., pp. 25-26, doc. 361.

⁶ AMAE, Fond 33, vol. 17, file 134-135.

toward the Jews, based on reforms and emigration, utterly rejecting any persecution, confiscation, and violence, resiliently meeting the German plans with refusal, finally deflecting responsibility for the atrocities on Germans alone¹. Too late for some 300 thousands souls, and Romania, whose leader shouted years before, after the first interventions: "Let the Americans come and judge me".

With Polish bishops revealing the Nazi atrocities in Poland from the very beginning, and latter on, with the deportation and extermination process galvanizing to action, and triggering interventions from Papal Nuncios, the case of Vatican is equally important. In some cases, Slovakia, Hungary, France, Romania; the Nuncios – Giuseppe Burzio in Bratislava, Angelo Rotta in Budapest, and Andrea Cassulo in Bucharest – spared no energy in disseminating informations, revealing the truth behind "deportations", acting as channels of communication, pressuring directly or indirectly governments, bribing official whenever possible, protecting Jews by means of conversion to Christianity in countries where Jewishness was defined in terms of religion².

Though less documented, with the "smoking gun" still missing, Cassulo's intervention in Romania, might have consisted of, and counted as much as Burzio's in Slovakia: disseminating informations about the fate of the deported Jews, translating Eichmann's euphemisms (i.e. resettlement into physical extermination), providing evidences of the existing factories of death with 1943³. What is for sure is that many Romanian Jews were converted to Catholicism, an operation as successful as to turn Ion Antonescu furious against the "Judeo-Hungarian conspiracy", turning Jews into Hungarian, and thus attempting to save them from deportation⁴. Last but not least, by 1943 and somewhat bluffing, the Nuncio promised Mihai Antonescu Vatican's endorsement to Romania's efforts to leave the Axis and negotiate with the allies, in exchange for protection for the new converted⁵.

Rather useless at the beginning, all those efforts turned fruitful at the end. If not for more, they were at least "corrosive", gradually shattering the confidence of the Romanians in the almightiness of Germany, and therefore forcing them to partially reconsider their position and policy. With most of the members of the cabinet not turning less anti-Semitic to the end of the war, and with the Nazis pressing for the deportation of Jews to Poland, emigration to Palestine and deportation and

¹ AMAE, Fond 33, vol. 17, file 173-175.

² Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 645, 650-651. The Nazis were trying to keep the secret and deceive the Slovak, Romanians, and others that their Jews, once extracted and deported to Poland for forced labor, were subjected to a regime of "physical conservation", not extermination. Rotta was among the firsts to find out about the extermination process taking place in the Lublin area and spread information without waiting for more evidence. For Romania see Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști, partea a II-a*, cit., pp. 273-274, doc. 556.

³ Richard OVERY, *Interrogations. Inside the Minds of the Nazi Elite*, Penguin Books, London, 2001, pp. 358-359; Heinz HÖHNE, *The Order of the Death's Head...* cit., p. 396, Yehuda BAUER, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, cit., p. 182, Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 374. As Dieter Wiesliceny put it after the war the Slovak government did not know about the fate of the Jews after the deportation, as extermination was a matter of secrecy. Diplomatic efforts by Burzio led to a halting of deportation and a request from the Slovak government for an inspection visit to Poland, refused by Eichmann. Difficult to state whether Slovaks or Romanians knew or not. Anyway, after being informed, it was impossible for them to say that they did not, continue to play ignorant, and refuse to acknowledge reality.

⁴ AN, Fond PCM, dosar 179/1942, file 174-175.

⁵ ASB, Fond PCM, dosar 353/1943, file 1-3, 56-61, 63-68, 122-126.

relocation to the East, meaning Transnistria in this particular case, both faint echoes of long abandoned German plans, are illustrative in this sense¹. Not being that stupid as not to realize that the Germans are no longer supportive toward the outdated old-new approaches of the Jewish Question, the Romanians were bright enough as to turn them into alternatives, and a perfect excuse for not deporting the Jews of Regat, Banat, and Transylvania to Poland. In fact, as the Romanians put it, they were not protecting or saving the Jews, nor were they defecting the German Final Solution, but simply going back to the original plans as the could not cope with the hasty dynamic of Nazi policy. In other words, ethnic cleansing operations continued by other means, with the government making even some profit out of it in some cases, at the same time signaling the allies that Romania took a different path². The Nazis could not do much, though they protested and on several occasions opposed and even attempted to jeopardize the Romanians unworkable plans. Nonetheless, to the very end they hoped that the Romanians will return to radical measures³.

Up to 1944, the Germans opposed emigration from Romania, and made efforts to stop it by all means and at all levels. However, as they could not reach Ion Antonescu, all they got were nothing more than promises from Mihai Antonescu that the issue will be reconsidered⁴. Not even the interventions of the German government, but not Hitler, in any case not direct interventions, no matter the threats, and long list of ideological (racial principles), political and military arguments could not determine the Romanians to halt emigration⁵, which went rather slow, as the Romanian government refused any direct involvement in coordinating the operations, and refrained from providing the Red Cross, and Jewish Organizations with means of transportation. Facing critics from the Western allies, protests and threats from the Germans, and corruption from his own bureaucracy, Ion Antonescu decided in late May 1944 to halt emigration "till the state will be able to organize it on serious grounds"⁶. Considering the rather small number of Jews that left Romania as to reach Palestine after a long and unsafe voyage, one can only conclude that emigration did not mattered much in saving the Romanian Jews. It served only to deceive the allies, and as an excellent excuse for departing the German solution.

Paradoxical as it might seem, the very existence of Transnistria as an alternative space where the Romanians could deport their Jews, as well as other categories of "undesirables" also endangered the Nazi plans. From mid 1941 up to late 1942, Romanians did not give up the idea to evacuate Jews under their control to this region. Nothing was organized in advance, as from there the deportees were to be later pushed over the Bug, into Russia⁷. German local and central authorities panicked, protested, and opposed the Romanians, from the highest to the lowest level of command, by means of diplomatic pressures and negotiations down to killing and plundering expeditions by the local German Police in Transnistria, which was under Romanian administration yet, with the Romanians not knowing

¹ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...* cit., pp. 282-283.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 283-284.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 285-286.

⁴ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Bilanțul tragediei – renașterea speranței*, cit., pp. 387-388, doc. 350.

⁵ AMAE, Fond 33, vol. 17, file 102-107.

⁶ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Bilanțul tragediei – renașterea speranței*, cit., pp. 395-397, doc. 357, 358.

⁷ IDEM (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, cit., pp. 202-203, doc. 490.

how to react, and with thousands of Jews massacred in the spring of 1942¹. In many respects Transnistria was but the outcome of a deadlock of Romanian policy to ethnically cleanse Romania, a deadlock generated by the lack of communication between the Germans and the Romanians, and therefore a clash of two visions. Latter on, and when convenient, as to prove their independence when refusing to deport their Jews to Poland, the Romanians could turn to their dumping ground, their General Government. With time passing, and Romania deserting the Nazi Final Solution, Transnistria also served to deceive the Germans.

The horrendous mass killings of 1941 that together with Transnistria make the core of the Romanian Holocaust represented for the Antonescu regime components of an instrumental ethnic cleansing policy. Though a powerful political tool, mass killing was never turned by the Romanians into an end in itself, except for the case of Odessa. It is rather difficult to claim that the Romanians intended to exterminate the entire Jewish population of Romania at large. Their goals were rather "limited", at least when it came to the Regat and Transylvania and Banat: force the Jews to submit, give up assets, contribute to war effort with huge amount of money, accept force labor and needed be, deportations. Moreover, with the passage of time, a physical solution to the Jewish question turned impractical, not only geopolitically, but also financially, as it was permanent. In other words, and by all means, it was "bad business". Vested interest made the Romanians reconsider their policy, thus going from emotional to more rational perpetrators. For most of the Romanian decision-makers the Jews were unwanted, an active enemy at most, but not a metahistorical one². True, Ion Antonescu's permanent frustration with conventional military and political strategy might have had sparked further deportations and killings at any time, especially in 1944. Yet, in spite of the many deadlocks, the other decision-makers did not support his attempts to turn to anger as a mobilizational factor. Some shred of compassion with the victims is not to be totally ignored, as total extermination might have represented a psychological barrier they could not cross, as many others. Like the Slovaks, the Romanians might have seen the deportation as a huge operation that would "shove off (the Jews) to the East never to be seen again"³, rejecting extermination when they had to take the substantial risk of alienating western allies and incite further intervention, both domestic and international. Thus, instead of escalating and radicalizing the anti-Jewish measures, like in Germany⁴, the circumstances and stakes of late 1942 to mid 1944 mild the Romanian ones. Greed and clumsiness of Romanian bureaucrats, *expectocrats* rather than *expertocrats* only oiled the shifting mechanism, with vice playing a more important role than virtue in "saving" half of the Jews of Romania.

The unpredicted developments and responses of the Romanian government toward Nazi plans were not logical and natural. As a consequence of the fierce anti-Semitism of the prewar period some of the most shocking anti-Jewish crimes were possible in 1941, with the latter shift to less barbaric means, but without giving up hate, made possible by traditional pragmatism, opportunism, and corruption, which altogether tempered the Romanian government and made it opt for a

¹ AMAE, Problema 33, vol. 15, fila 58, also AN, Fond PCM, dosar 104/1942, fila 306.

² Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. xvii-xx.

³ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit. p. 379, also Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 450, 452, 537.

⁴ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit. pp. 426-427.

more cautious path¹. Hard to choose the appropriate word and say that Romanians halted, deferred, deserted, disengaged from the Final solution and thus "saved" half of their Jews. May be Hilberg was right when saying that by freezing – not accidentally – the deportations, they fell short in reaching German standards². A less compulsive and more compromising with late 1942 policy indicates that the Final Solution was not a fundamental issue for the Romanian government, nonetheless that the price to be finally paid did mattered for Bucharest. As a result, the Romanian government did not save Jews; it only limited the number of victims, sparing their lives for an undermined period of time.

As Robert Gellately put it for the Holocaust as a whole, "a half century has passed since the end of the war, and we continue to learn about the abuses, the persecutions, the murder, and the mayhem. We have made great strides in historical research, but it is no less clear that much work remains to be done to clarify and to explain what happened"³. Far from concluding on this episode, the present paper only attempted to advocate the need for further research on the Romanian Holocaust, a subject that has not been yet exhausted. Not necessarily bringing all pieces together, my reconstruction simply extrapolated from events, some of the documents, testimonies, and work of other historians, thus offering the reader rather reflections and shadows, not a full scale picture of reality.

¹ Bela VAGO, "The Reactions to the Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy in East-Central Europe and in the Balkans", in François FURET (ed.), *Unanswered Questions...*cit., pp. 227-233.

² Raul HILBERG, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders...*cit., pp. 77-84.

³ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 263.